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# The Historical Decline of Spirituality, Its Collapse in the AI Era, and the Need for Philosophical Engagement for Its Revival

Abstract: *This article explores the profound impact of accelerated technological advancement, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI), on fundamental concepts of human existence, including human nature, essence, and condition, and the very meaning of life. It posits a critical dilemma: do we need to redefine meaning, or simply re-evaluate and rectify existing understandings in this new technological era? The paper argues that philosophical anthropology, as a discipline, must address the risks posed by AI, especially the despiritualization and dehumanization witnessed in the regression of the human soul and spirituality. It traces this decline through four emblematic historical maxims: Protagoras's "Man is the measure of all things" (representing the initial unity of body-mind-soul), Shakespeare's "To be or not to be" (reflecting the emergence of existential uncertainty and the questioning of the soul), Nietzsche's "God is dead" (signifying the abandonment of the theological paradigm in favor of science and the subsequent marginalization of the soul), and Hawking's "I fear that AI may replace humans altogether" (highlighting contemporary anxieties about human autonomy and the future of the soul in a technologically dominated world). The article contends that science, particularly psychology, has erred by excluding the soul from its research due to its association with religion, thereby hindering a holistic understanding of the human psychic system. It calls for philosophical anthropology to engage critically and constructively with both science and technology. The ultimate aim is to develop new models for personality, society, and culture that adapt to technological changes while mitigating dehumanization and despiritualization. The goal is to ensure that, even in a technologically advanced future, humanity, with its authentic body, mind, and soul, can remain the "measure of all things," preserving the intrinsic purpose, significance, and value of human life and existence.*

**Keywords**: *human soul; spirituality; technological impact; artificial intelligence; human existence; philosophical anthropology; despiritualization; meaning of life; AI ethics; Protagoras.*

# Introduction

The accelerated advancement of technology, especially of artificial intelligence, has brought to the forefront of debates in the fields of humanities,of philosophy, a multitude of issues and questions related to fundamental concepts of human existence such as human nature, essence, and condition, and, in correlation with these, concerning the meaning of life and human existence.

Regarding this latter issue, the questions mainly head in two directions:

1) in the conditions of the heightened technologization of society and human existence, is there a need to change the meaning and seek/ find a new meaning/meanings, or

2) will it be necessary to reevaluate and rectify these?

In the context of these new realities facing humanity, philosophy and, particularly, philosophical anthropology must seriously consider the risks associated with AI and other technological dangers and conceive ideas, proposals, and models to prevent even a potential apocalyptic scenario. Debates and research are being conducted, and solutions are sought with significant theoretical anthropo-philosophical and humanitarian impact, primarily driven by the need to respond to the extraordinary technological progress's impact on the historically established values, themes, principles, and foundations of human society, culture, and civilization. These elements of a world that seemed immutable for centuries or millennia now appear to be in decline due to new technological developments, with some elements even at risk of disappearing, akin to certain species of plants or animals.

One such element seems to be the human soul, which is undoubtedly undergoing a regressive process in the broader context of the processes of despiritualization and dehumanization, if considering how philosophy, anthropology, or traditional culture represent them.

In the debates regarding the challenges to the meaning of human existence closely linked to the decline and regression of the soul and human spirituality, the humanistic disciplines, philosophy, and philosophical anthropology are challenged to contribute, through their specific approaches and instruments, at least to efforts to slow down humanity's spiritual decline. However, the central mission is to contribute to the debates on the challenges to the human nature, essence, and condition, as well as to the inquiries about how the concept of the meaning of life and human existence will be defined in the new historical conditions, in the trilemma: conservation – change – rectification.

These inquiries aim not only at the general concept of the meaning of life and human existence but also at related concepts, categories, and aspects such as the purpose, significance, and value of life and human existence, issues of freedom and free will, death versus eternity, faith, morality, personal happiness and fulfillment, coexistence, solidarity, individualism versus altruism etc. The focus must be on the future, but everything has its roots in the past; it is a historical, gradual process. The present and future are continuations of the past, even if the current technological progress seems revolutionary, with possible interpretations as a break from the past.

In this sense, the initial focus – in a philosophical-anthropological paradigm centered on categories of meaning of human existence and human nature – will be directed towards the beginnings of philosophical, anthropo-philosophical reflections on man and humanity through a symbolic, heuristic, and speculative incursion into the history and (in)evolution of the human soul and spirituality, implicitly of man and humanity, considering four relevant moments of this evolution/ involution, reflected in four maxims, metaphors, sayings of important intellectual figures in human history, namely: "Man is the measure of all things" (Protagoras); "To be or not to be – that is the question" (Shakespeare/Hamlet); "God is dead" (Nietzsche); "I fear that AI may replace humans altogether" (Hawking).

## ”Man Is The Measure Of All Things"

In its essence, Protagoras' famous maxim highlights the centrality of man in relation to the world and the living environment. The statement implies inherently the representation of man through the anthropo-constitutional trinity: body-mind-soul. The body is a biological support, the mind is an instrument of knowledge, and the human soul is what gives cohesion, unity, and humanity to the person. Therefore, through the soul, man is more than a mere material element or passive observer of the universe. He is an active spiritual-axiological participant in the process of interpreting and constructing reality, attributing meaning to his life and human existence in general. The soul is the inner engine that drives him to explore, discover, create, lives as a human being.

The essence of the maxim "Man is the measure of all things" thus lies in prioritizing the spiritual dimension of the human being, man truly being the measure of all things, and the human being, through his soul, representing the center of the known universe. Through their axiological-spiritual capacities, people are endowed with the power to give meaning and significance to existence and to connect with the world by mastering it.

In light of this understanding, our historical philosophical-anthropological incursion unfortunately also leads us towards the beginning of the deconstruction/disintegration of the anthropo-ontological unity body-mind-soul, pertaining to a historical process of despiritualization through the accelerated advancement of rationality and materiality starting from the post-feudal centuries.

If anthropogenesis consisted of the gradual, step-by-step construction of man, with the attribute of human nature (body - mind - soul), in order: the formation of the body, the formation of the mind, the formation of the soul, the apex representing their unity and balance, synchronous with the establishment and institution of great religions and cultures, the subsequent history of humanity seems to represent a reverse process, of loss and decline in the original nature and integral meaning of human existence, which begins with the involution and decline of the human soul, possibly followed by the decline of rationality surpassed by artificial intelligence, and finally by the decline of the body, and humanity, through the replacement of biological human beings with robots.

In anthropo-philosophical terms, the decline of the soul and the beginning of the process of despiritualization/ dehumanization can be observed also through the

emergence of existentialist ideas and currents, which question the great human, cultural, and moral certainties established anthropo-historically. The famous Hamletian/ Shakespearean soliloquy "To be or not to be, that is the question" can be considered relevant and emblematic from this point of view, thus marking a first stage in the involution/decline of the human soul/spirituality and the first shake-up of the perception and representation of the original meaning of human life and existence, constituted under the sign of absolute unity: body-mind-soul.

## "To Be Or Not To Be, That Is The Question"

The rise of existentialist thought/philosophy, of science, and rational knowledge in post-feudal and moderne era has led to questioning the anthropocentric view. The vastness of the universe and the complexity of human behavior call into question the idea of an immutable meaning of human existence, of a singular, central, and unified human nature under the sign of the unity of body-mind-soul. The existential soliloquy "To be or not to be – that is the question" reflects the beginning of this upheaval, of uncertainties and shifts in the vision of humans, the soul, and the meaning of human life and existence. From here arose questions such as if the soul/spirit is no longer seen as one of the fundamental constitutional aspects of human being, what then defines the nature, the meaning, and purpose of human life and humanity?

The soliloquy reflects also a confrontation with nonexistence and a profound uncertainty regarding the meaning of life associated with the soul and the spiritual dimension. If life can end at any moment, and our existence is fragile, then what is its spiritual-cosmological value and centrality?

Here, Hamlet's reflection opens a door to fertile debates about what it means to be human, a human being, and, closely related to the issue of the existence of the soul, about human (soulful) suffering. Hamlet refers, incidentally, not only to his own existence and personal soulful drama but also to major ontological-anthropological categories such as the human condition in general, the expression of which can be interpreted as an invitation to an introspective incursion into the universal sources of human soulful, the fragility of his existence. The character reflects on the sufferings and soul trials that life brings and wonders if they justify not only his existence but, in general, the existence of humanity anywhere and anytime.

Here, in this thematic and historical context, Hamlet's soul suffering could be framed, relative to what exactly determined and motivated his tragic-dilemma reflection. What exactly is tormented, who, what suffers in his being? Is it not his soul? The human soul in it? Does not the life-death dilemma involve the life or death of the human soul? Is not one of the meanings of the classic soliloquy "To be or not to be" *to be or not to be a soul in existential decline?* The decline, or even the threat of extinction, invoked, including by Friedrich Nietzsche's statement "God is dead."

## "God is Dead"

Friedrich Nietzsche's "proposition" represented a turning point in the evolution of anthropo-philosophical thought, having significant repercussions on the concept of the meaning of human life and existence and in areas such as religion, science, and human identity, and especially in the perception of spirituality and the human soul. With the formulation "God is dead," the German philosopher intended to draw attention to the decline of Christianity and its influence on Western culture. This declared "death" of God had a major impact on religion, generating as well a cultural crisis in society. People began to face a spiritual void, questioning the meaning of life and the moral values that were once unshakeable. In addition, the expression coincided with significant progress in science and rationality in the 19th century, developments that transformed and profoundly influenced human thought, replacing faith and religious dogmas with an approach based on research, evidence, and reason, almost completely eliminating the soul from research concerns.

In this context, "God is dead" also meant the abandonment – in terms of understanding/knowledge of man, life, society, and nature – of the theological paradigm in favor of the scientific one, provoking an intellectual and cultural revolution, generating virulent debates on the meaning of life and human existence, on the nature and identity of man. In the absence of a God to provide meaning and purpose, people were left with the task of creating their own meaning in life and an autonomous identity through scientific knowledge, technical progress, and self-determination. This led to the establishment of true survival and self-affirmation philosophies such as Existentialism, Personalism, Utilitarianism, and others, which explored the individual's existential dilemmas in a seemingly meaningless world, in confusion, where in order to survive, man must take full responsibility for his own destiny. Nietzsche introduces or develops survival concepts in conditions of social anomie such as the will to power and free will, both of which exclude the human soul but extol the ego.

This vision, which also involves anthropo-philosophical considerations related to the meaning of human existence, nature and condition, has substantially influenced subsequent thinking on psychology, ethics, as well as philosophy, bringing to the forefront the problem of the decline or even the end of the human soul, first in research and theoretical-scientific modeling and later as a fact and side of the human personality/being.

In Christian religion/theology there is a close connection between God and the soul. One aspect of this relationship suggests that God created man and the soul at the same time, and the soul reflects the divinity in man, ultimately giving him his specific identity and nature, man cannot be conceived outside the connection with his spiritual side, with the soul. As a result of the "death of God," the soul "died" as well. But its essence, its identity has been distorted, and the (spiritual) man has died. There remains the animal man, through the body, or the bio-cybernetic man through the mind, through intelligence. Both positions are researched and promoted as representative of the human being by science.

Science claims that man created God and that the soul does not actually exist. As a result of scientific progress, especially in scientific psychology, the dominant paradigm has focused on the study of bio-psychic mechanisms, the mind, the self, consciousness, and behavior. The soul, as an entity cataloged as supernatural, or as an epiphenomenon and impossible to be measured/observed, has been largely excluded from scientific research and personality models. Contemporary science/psychology, therefore, considers that the concept of the

soul has no empirical basis and that all psychological aspects, including those of an empathetic or spiritual order, can be explained by biological and neurological processes. This materialistic approach supports the thesis that the psychic system and human identity are absolutely and totally products of cerebral/organic activity and do not require an existence or an instance called soul.

The thesis and its argumentation have entered into full consonance with developments in the field of technology, artificial intelligence, for which the soul is not only not an object of interest but is also considered a possible impediment, a brake related to the past of humanity that could hinder its progress.

In relation to this scientific, technologist, and post-humanistic/post-human attitude, of the presumed danger represented for the human soul and for humanity, there are, however, numerous positions. In our effort, we bring to attention the frightening prophecy of Stephen Hawking: "I fear that AI may replace humans altogether."

## "I Fear That AI May Replace Humans Altogether"

Stephen Hawking's statement invokes and resonates with a palpable fear that human power, autonomy, and uniqueness could be undermined gradually and through a deep call for introspection and the search for a new or revised meaning of human life and existence. This quest becomes crucial in an era where technology becomes increasingly omnipresent and influential in our daily lives. We are not only facing questions about how AI will affect our jobs and the economy, but also deeper questions about how AI will alter our interpersonal relationships, our culture, and even our personal and collective identity. One of the major subsequent aspects of this quest is the fate and future of human soul and spirituality, which were always considered central aspects of humanity, fundamentally defining us and guiding us in the search for meaning and purpose in life.

In the face of rapid technological progress, these concepts seem to be put into uncertainty. In a world dominated by algorithms and technical efficiency, there is a risk that the depth of the soul and the subtlety of spiritual experiences will be reduced to mere performance and productivity factors. There is a fear that our interpersonal relationships will become increasingly cybernetic and that our personal experiences will become more and more standardized.

## Instead of Conclusions and on the Necessity and Role of a Philosophical Engagement

Faced with this frightening landscape, it becomes imperative for philosophy, for ontology, for philosophical anthropology to seek/ find new meanings of human life and existence that go beyond technological achievements or the satisfaction of material needs, but recognize and value the richness and complexity of our humanity's spiritual and cultural heritage.

Thus, perhaps the greatest challenge of our century is not so much technological advancement itself, but how we choose to confront this change and define our own humanity in its context. In light of these challenges, Stephen Hawking's words become more than just a warning, these become a profound call to reflection and action, an urging for philosophy/ anthropological philosophy to explore new horizons of humanity and seek new meanings of our life and existence, or a human/ humane correction of it in a world marked by technology and perpetual change.

A crucial role in this effort to mitigate the harmful effects of technological progress, the unstoppable progress of artificial intelligence, especially in the endeavors to seeking/ finding new meanings of human life and existence, or in their rectification, should be played, therefore, by philosophy, especially by philosophical anthropology.

After considering the four emblematic maxims, metaphors, and sayings of important thinkers in human history, one might ask: What could be the next emblematic saying of a significant and representative thinker from the future, for example, a hundred years from now, that would address the situation of the soul and human spirituality at that time? In relation to this, what would it reveal about cardinal anthropo-philosophical categories such as the human nature, essence, and condition, and, above all, the meaning, the specificity of human life and existence at that time?

Certainly, philosophy too, especially philosophical anthropology, will likely play an important role in the future formulation of such a saying. In its "salvational" endeavor, philosophical anthropology should, in our view, operate in a more correlated and unified manner with other branches, primarily in two directions. One should be directed towards science, particularly psychological science, the scientific psychology, and the other towards technology, AI, and robotics.

Regarding the struggle, confrontation, or collaboration with psychology, philosophical anthropology should start by asserting that science (scientific psychology) has made and continues to make a significant mistake by eliminating the soul from its sphere of research and the theoretical models it uses to represent human personality and the human being as a whole. This exclusion has been largely due to its close association with religion, the soul being perceived as an outdated scientific object, similar to the religion that supposedly invented it. By associating the soul with religion, science/scientific psychology "threw the baby (the soul) out with the bathwater (religion)," disregarding the fact that the soul can and should be analyzed outside of religion. The argument has also been made that even if the soul existed as part of human personality and being, it cannot be investigated or measured by scientific methods because it does not have a perceptible and directly quantifiable existence. Therefore, it should not be a subject of scientific research and modeling.

In relation to these errors of science, of scientific psychology, philosophical anthropology should clarify that psychology has a scientific interest in other psychic entities which also cannot be directly discerned, but only assumed or hypothesized. These are brought into the realm of science/psychology and researched, even though they are essentially para-scientific categories/entities, of the same nature as the soul. Then why should the soul be excluded from scientific/psychological discourse? It is as little demonstrable as the other psychic entities mentioned earlier. Its total "discriminatory" exclusion from

research and debate can deprive science of an authentic, integral, and deeper understanding of what it truly means to be a human psychic system, a human personality, a human being, in relation to which the great anthropo-philosophical categories such as the meaning of human life and existence, human nature, essence, and condition are established.

Regarding the impact of technology on the soul, human spirituality, and, in correlation, on the meaning of human life and existence, with possible repercussions on crucial anthropo-philosophical aspects and categories such as the human nature, essence, and condition, philosophical anthropology in its endeavors must seek to address and provide solutions to issues such as:

- Can accelerated technological progress, the technologization of society and humanity, lead to a fundamental change in how we conceive the meaning of life and human existence?
- As AI becomes increasingly autonomous and capable, is it possible for humans to reevaluate their fundamental values, principles, and beliefs?
- Could collaboration between humans and technology lead to extraordinary discoveries and achievements that significantly improve the quality of human life?
- Can accelerated technological progress and the technologization of society and humanity facilitate a new understanding of the meaning of human life and existence or a rectification of it based on close collaboration and coexistence between humans and technology?
- Will crucial reconsiderations be made to the major categories and concepts related to the meaning of human life and existence such as the purpose of life and human existence, its value, the issue of freedom and free will, the issue of death versus eternity, faith, morality, personal happiness and fulfillment, coexistence and solidarity, etc.?

What can be speculated and estimated is that philosophical anthropology, through its confrontation and collaboration with technology, can contribute, with critical and constructive involvement, to slowing down the uncontrolled and chaotic process of technologization and robotization of society, concomitantly with slowing down the general process of dehumanization and deculturalization through despiritualization.

But its greatest task is to develop and offer, in collaboration with social anthropology, educational anthropology, cultural anthropology, political anthropology, legal anthropology, as well as with other social-human sciences/ disciplines, particularly psychology, ideas, concepts, theses, and models of personality, society, culture, education, work, politics, justice, ethics, etc., adapting to the changes that technology inherently and inexorably brings to society and human life.

In this way, even a hundred years from now, the human being, the man, with its cosmologically authentic nature and meaning as a three-dimensional being – body, mind, soul – in relation to the world and the environment in which it will live, can still be considered the "measure of all things."

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